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A STUDY OF THE COPPERHEADS
DURING THE CIVIL WAR

BY

BEN CONRAD BERG

THESIS

for the

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN

HISTORY

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCE
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A Study of the

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Bachelor of Arts in History

in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

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A Study of the Copperheads during the Civil War.

Thaddeus Stevens described "copperheads" as "weak kneed and thinskinne'd unionists, men who were unwilling to stand by the Union unless it protected slavery, men who were willing to denounce the administration for every forward move, men who made Lincoln's life a burden in the conduct of the war".¹ If Clement C. Vallandigham, one of the leaders of the copperhead movement, had been asked to define what the copperheads were, he most probably would have said that they were unionists who only desired "the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was". It was hard for many people in the North during the Civil War to distinguish any essential difference in the content of the two definitions. A story is told of an army officer who was enrolling the farmers of a certain district according to their political convictions. He enquired of one farmer, "How shall I enroll you?" "As a Union man," he answered. But the officer wanted more particular information and asked him what kind of a union man he claimed to be. The farmer replied that he was "for the Union as it was and the Constitution as it is". "D--m such an answer," roared the officer, "such men are the d--nest rebels. I enroll you as disloyal."² This represented the opinion of many northern people during the war.

Townshend defines the term "copperhead" as a sobriquet given a party that was in sympathy with the Confederate States, giving aid

1. Woodburn, p. 193.

2. Marshall, p. 160.

by endeavoring to thwart measures of the National Government.¹ A campaign stanza of 1864 gives a general idea of their particular distinguishing marks.

"Of all the factious men we've seen,
Existing now, or long since dead,
No one was ever known so mean
As him we call a copperhead,
A draft evading copperhead,
A rebel aiding copperhead,
A growling, slandering, scowling, pandering,
Vicious, states rights copperhead."²

The term itself meant different things at different times and different places. Rhodes speaks of Governor Seymour of New York as the leader of the copperhead movement in the East in the same way that Vallandigham was the director in the West.³ Brummer, however, who made an intensive study of New York politics, said emphatically that Seymour was not a copperhead.⁴ It was a very elastic term. As a term of abuse, it was often used to cover every one outside of the Union party. The peace democrats accepted the name and tried to give it an honorable status. The active sympathizer of the South, however, succeeded more than any one else in giving to the term its present connotation.

The word "copperhead" first appeared in print in an article in the Cincinnati Commercial in 1862 entitled "Comfort for Copperheads". It must have already at that time become a term in current usage. The most logical explanation of the origin of the term seems to be that it came from the badges made from the Indian head of a cent, which was fastened upon a pin and worn by those to whom the name copperhead was first applied.⁵ Once made a part of the vocabulary of the newspapers, it spread through the entire North. It soon came to be

1. Townshend, p. 160

2. Townshend, P. 160.

3. Rhodes IV, p. 225.

4. Brummer, p. 232.

5. Rhodes IV, p. 224.

used to designate a certain kind of political thought, and as that thought changed, so the strict meaning of the term changed. It is with the origin, growth, content, and results of this political movement that this paper deals.

As a political movement, it was distinctly connected with the problems that grew out of the secession of the southern states and the Civil War. The political platforms of 1860 dealt with entirely different matters than those upon which "Copperheadism" depended for sustenance. The principal plank in the republican platform of 1860 declared that "we deny the authority of Congress, of a territorial legislature, or of individuals to give legal existence to slavery in any territory of the United States."¹ The Baltimore convention that nominated Douglass affirmed the old democratic platform of 1856 with reference to the non-interference by Congress with slavery in any state or territory and added a plank to the effect that the supreme court was the final arbiter on slavery extension in the territories.² The part of the old democracy, that supported Breckenbridge, also affirmed the platform of 1856, but declared that Congress should protect the slave holders in their property rights in the territories.² In this division of the democratic party of 1860, there is no indication of the issues upon which the democratic party of the North was so soon to divide. The attitude, however, of some of the northern democrats was shown in the Baltimore convention when Benjamin Butler and the Massachusetts delegation withdrew because, as he declared, he would "not sit in a convention where African slave trade, which is a piracy by the laws of my country, is approvingly advocated."³ The similarities between the two great wings of the democratic party of

¹ Chadwick, p. 117

² Chadwick, p. 108

³ Chadwick, p. 115.

1860 were greater than the small differences, and the different candidates of each faction cannot be said to have destroyed the unity of the party in the deeper sense.

The secession of the southern states brought about a division of the democratic party of an entirely different kind. In fact, it resulted two different parties in two different nations. Theoretically, there came to be as many guesses as to the relation between the democracy of the North and that of the South as there were theories in regard to secession. In the excitement that resulted from the secession, the political factors from the party standpoint clouded the greater national issues that were involved. The secession of the south was the result of a republican political victory ^{and} Southern democracy took the matter into their own hands and left their northern political friends to shift for themselves with the victorious republicans. It was not probable that the democracy of the North would merge with the republicans: it rather preferred to seek to reunite with its old party associates. But the southern democracy built an international boundary between the North and the South and then the question confronting the northern democrats and republicans alike became, "What are we going to do about the secession?"

A period of indecision, peace plans, and compromise schemes followed. Every one was for peace if it could be secured together with the retention of the Union, and men hesitated to talk about war. But there was a difference of opinion as to the course of action if the Union could not be restored by peaceful means. Buchanan, the democratic president, in his annual message to Congress on January 9, 1860 said, in discussing coercion as a means of dealing with secession, that "after much reflection I have arrived at the conclusion

that no such power (coercion) has been delegated to Congress nor to any other department of the government. Congress possesses many means of preserving it (Union) by the Constitution, by conciliation; but the sword was not placed in their hand to preserve it by force."¹ In other words, he believed the Constitution and conciliation, or compromise, the sole remedies. These were two remedies for the secession trouble that a large group of democrats soon tried to patent.

The president elect, Lincoln, in discussing proposed coercive measures, said, "What is coercion and what is invasion? Would the collection of the United States revenues and the withdrawal of the use of the mails in a state be coercion? What mysterious right to play tyrant is conferred on a district of the country by merely calling that district a state?"² Nationalism and the execution of the United States' laws over all the states were the principles of Lincoln's supporters and they believed that the application of them was the surest remedy for secession.

Did the democracy of the North agree with Buchanan? Whether they agreed with his political ideas with regard to secession or not, their attitude towards the south was about the same. They dreaded to think of war waged upon old political allies. Douglass inveighed against the attempts of the extremists on both sides to bring on a war and urged that a national convention or amendments to the Constitution should settle the questions.³ During the time that Buchanan was merely filling out his administration, the democrats were active in organizing peace meetings throughout the northern states.

A peace conference of such a character was held in New York in

¹ Sherman, p. 212.

² Harper's Weekly, Vol. 5, p. 119

³ Willis, p. 337.

January, 1861. Resolutions were passed to the effect that the crisis was produced by sectional passions, and compromise was the only remedy, as civil war could not restore the union since it was a barrier in the path of reconstruction. "Concession, Conciliation, and Compromise" were the methods of preserving the union.¹ The conference was about to pass a resolution declaring coercion was more revolutionary than secession when Ex-Governor Clinton protested against the trend of the conference, and said emphatically, "Secession is revolution". Voices from different parts of the hall quickly retorted, "We are all rebels then".² The attitude that these peace meetings showed, undoubtedly encouraged the border states to follow the lead of the extreme south.³ The democratic press took a similar attitude towards coercion until the way in which the coercion began changed the complexion of the situation.

Certain prominent democratic leaders in the north, however, were giving views to which they adhered during the entire war. On December 19, 1860, Senator Lane of Oregon said in the Senate, "I now serve notice that when war is made on the gallant South for withdrawing from the union which refuses them their rights, the northern democracy will not join in the crusade.- The republican party will have war enough at home".⁴ Franklin Pierce in referring to the chances of war in a letter to Jefferson Davis said that the North, "if we ever reach the arbitrament of arms, will find occupation enough at home".⁵ The mayor of New York City, Fernando Wood, stated that the Union "being a government created by opinion, its continu-

¹ Greely VI, p. 395.

² Brummer, p. 117; Greely VI, p. 388.

³ Greely, VI, p. 396.

⁴ Logan, p. 260.

⁵ Jones, p. 258.

ance is dependent on the sentiment which formed it".¹ On January 6, 1861, in a report to the city council, he said that New York should secede from its own state and become a free city. "If the Confederacy is broken up," he said, "the government is dissolved and it behooves every district and community, as well as every individual, to take care of themselves."² Clement Vallandigham of Ohio, who was a strong democratic leader in the House of Representatives, outlined early in February 1861 a certain attitude that he preserved during the entire war. In a speech in the House, he said, "I am all over and all together a Union man. I would preserve it in all its integrity and worth. But I repeat that this cannot be done by coercion, by the sword."³ As a remedy for secession he proposed an amendment to the constitution which would divide the country into four great sections, a north, a south and a west and an east. On the demand of any one section, the presidential election was to be taken by sections and the majority of electors in each section was necessary for a choice. The consent of all the states of a section was necessary before any state could secede from that section.⁴ Needless to say his plan received no support from his democratic colleagues as it was in itself destructive of national unity. It may be, that the idea of a Northwestern Confederacy which appeared later in the war may have had some connection with Vallandigham's proposed amendment.

A little group of Vallandigham's colleagues began early to attempt to balk any progressive action on the part of the national government. They voted against the creation of an inquiry committee to investigate why the forts in the South had been given up and why

¹ McPherson, p. 43.

² Logan, p. 255.

³ Life of Vallandigham, p. 149.

⁴ Greeley VI, p. 385; Randall, p. 163.

aid had not been sent to relieve them.¹ Mr. Thomas in representing their view said, "You complain that the states have taken public property. These forts were permitted to be erected for the defence of the people of the states, and the federal government has no right to use them for any other purpose. Whenever the people discern that they may be used for some other purpose, it is up to the people to see to it that they are used in their defence."² Vallandigham, himself, also made frequent trips back to Ohio to dissuade his party associates from joining with the republicans in any measures looking towards preparation for war.³ Other leaders took a similar stand. When the federal authorities seized in New York a consignment of twenty eight cases of muskets in route to Savannah, the mayor of the city telegraphed to the governor of South Carolina that if he had the power he would summarily punish that illegal and unjustifiable seizure of private property.⁴ In other words, the great majority of the leaders entered no word of complaint against the action of the south.

Thousands of democrats who had no desire for the dissolution of the Union, just wanted the secession bluff to go far enough to destroy the republican organization. Many took part in this encouragement of resistance who afterwards risked their lives for the Union.⁵ The great mass of northern democrats was interested in the various peace plans but as far as action was concerned they were inert. There was no leader who had a definite plan of procedure that commanded attention and so they waited to see what the new administration would do.

¹ McPherson, p. 80.

² Annual Ency., 1861, p. 210.

³ Randall, p. 161.

⁴ Brummer, p. 126.

⁵ Blaine, Vol. I, p. 274.

Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4, 1861. Fort Sumter was attacked on April 12, 1861 and on the 15th Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers. The administration had begun to deal with secession. The way in which South Carolina as a state opened the war on the national government did a great deal to lift the local political fog and made the greater national issues to stand out in clearer relief. A patriotic wave swept the North and a great part of the democratic press dropped as impractical the old compromise and conciliation schemes. The New York Herald of April 16, 1861 said, "the democrats are becoming disgusted with the neglect and ingratitude with which they have been treated by a section for which they have faithfully borne the heat and burden of a conflict for so many years."¹ But many democratic papers took another attitude. To them the South seemed to be defending itself from the republican hosts and therefore fighting the battles of democracy. The Banger Union said after the fall of Fort Sumter, "Democrats of Maine! The loyal sons of the South have gathered around Charleston, as your fathers of old gathered around Boston, in defence of the same sacred principles of liberty. Your sympathies are with the defenders of the truth and the right. Those who have inaugurated this war are no friends of yours, no friends of democratic liberty."² On April 15, 1861 the New York Express said, "the South in self-protection has been driven to the wall and forced to proclaim its independence. They fight upon their own soil in behalf of their dearest rights."³ Newspapers in every large city expressed similar sentiments and the question they naturally raised was whether such publications were traitorous or not. Seven newspapers

¹ Greeley, p. 456, Vol. I.

² Greeley, p. 456, Vol. I.

³ Greeley, p. 455, Vol. I.

in New York City during the summer of 1861 became so venomous that they were indicted, the mails closed to them, and the printing shops seized. Attacks on others seemed imminent.¹ Ropes were hung across lamp posts in other towns and placards "Death to Traitors" indicated the purpose for which they might be used.² These journals, in the early summer of 1861 did not represent any powerful branch of northern democracy. They seemed rather to be bits of the South, kicking away in a hostile environment and their influence was very small at this time.³ Most of the democrats acknowledged that something had to be done to meet the new crisis. Fernando Wood, who had advocated the secession of New York City, saw the drift of the public opinion and issued a proclamation, exhorting the people to ignore the past and to work for the restoration of "the Constitution and Union as they existed in the days and spirit of our fathers. Whether this is to be accomplished by fratricidal warfare or by concession, men may differ. I call upon the people to unite in obedience of laws and preservation of order and protection of property."⁴ He even spoke of the duty "to conquer a peace".⁵ The democratic legislature of New York after the news came of the fall of Fort Sumter passed a bill by a vote of 102 to 6 for the enrolling of militia on a two year basis and the men who had formerly spoken of coercion now talked of defense. The six, however, who voted against the bill were democrats from New York City.⁶ In the West Douglass was bringing the democratic party to accept his new viewpoint that the Union must be preserved and the insurrection crushed.⁷ On the day that Lincoln issued

¹ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 5, p. 563, 547. ² Marshall, p. 148.

³ Brummer, p. 154.

⁴ Annual Ency., 1861, p. 531.

⁵ Brummer, p. 142.

⁶ Brummer, p. 142.

⁷ Wellis, p. 347.

his call for 75,000 volunteers, Vallandigham sent out twenty letters to prominent western democrats to meet him at Chillecothe to confer on measures which would arouse the people to a sense of the danger that threatened the nation from the impending military despotism. Only four answers were returned to him and one of these was unfavorable.

But Douglass died on June 3d, 1861, the war was not over in three months, and the federal government began to have trouble with the population in some of the border states who were regarded as likely secessionists by the government and as party brothers by many northern democrats. Again, the new party leaders in the north, for Douglass was gone and the other great democrats were in the Confederacy, were looking for issues by which they could prevent a merger of the democratic and republican parties. Political barriers had to be built and it did not take long before plenty of material could be picked up with which to build them. Papers that had been considered disloyal in April 1861, catered to the new sentiment. It is needless to say that in the late summer of 1861 the democrats were not as unanimous as in April and May of the same year. Of course, the war had to be supported, but,--the administration had to be opposed.¹ Many found that in opposing the administration they had to oppose the war. These were the typical copperheads.

Matters had become a little irregular in Maryland during the summer of 1861. Maryland had a legislature which was suspected by the government of trying to take Maryland out of the Union, espec-

¹ Brummer, p. 154.

ially after it had passed resolutions demanding an immediate, peaceful recognition of the southern states. Disloyal sentiment was also rife in the state. It is reported that after the defeat at Bull Run, a Baltimore gentleman remarked that "after another victory we may hope for peace".¹ Several of the more dangerous members of the legislature were arrested and General Banks sent the Baltimore police board to the military prison at Fort Lafayette, Brooklyn.² The civil courts of Maryland were unable to enforce any proceedings against the military authorities or secure the release of the imprisoned men.² But certain democrats in Congress began to protest. Senator Pearce wanted to know by what constitutional right the secretary of state could order the arrest of men in loyal states where there was no treason but too much love of peace.³ Protests of a similar kind were numerous. Such protests were a good measure for the democrats with which they might advertise the bad characteristics of the republican administration.

Direct opposition to the war began also to be shown in various sections of the country. In August 1861, influential members of Mozart Hall, New York, told of the formation of an organization "opposed to the coercion of states, hostile to arbitrary and unconstitutional acts of the present federal administration, and in favor of peace and the restoration of the Union."⁴ In Connecticut, the governor called for four regiments of three year volunteers on August 15, 1861. On the 16th, some democrats organized an immense demonstration, that they called a "peace meeting" at Saybrook, Connecticut.

¹ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 5, p. 499.

² McPherson, p. 152-3.

³ Annual Encyclopedia, 1862, p. 286; 1861, p. 230-234.

⁴ Brummer, p. 159.

They tried to raise a peace flag, but union men broke in; a riot ensued. Similar riots occurred at Bridgeport.¹ At a large peace gathering at Plymouth, Indiana, Colonel Mulligan tried to teach the audience that the war was not begun or prosecuted to save the Union. In spite of great opportunities for compromise, the war continued for the purpose of breaking down the influence of the agricultural districts for the advantage of the manufacturing districts and the republican party. He attacked the administration and the war in the worst terms. Mulligan was arrested, tried by a military court and kept in prison until after the war.²

Some of the papers kept up a galling fire on the federal government. The New York Daily News in the summer of 1861 said referring to the government, "It has given its sanction to murders, massacres, illegal imprisonments, robbery of the treasury, withdrawal of the securities of life.....and forshadowed negro insurrections and authorized anarchy as a necessary portion of the immediate future."³ When after an indictment, the mails were closed to such newspapers, certain democratic congressmen became very active in inquiring into the source of the Postmaster General's power of passing on the merits of a periodical.⁴

In Congress, Vallandigham and a group of democrats were offering innumerable resolutions on the subject of the constitution and the war. Vallandigham became the great pillar in the support of the Constitution while his border state colleagues were striking at the war.⁵ Kennedy of Maryland said, "It is my solemn conviction that you

¹ Annual Encyclopedia, 1861, p. 251.

² Marshall, p. 72.

³ Brummer, p. 153.

⁴ McPherson, p. 188.

⁵ Greely Conflict, Vol. I. p. 561.

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also mentions the scope of the study and the limitations. The second part of the paper discusses the methodology used in the study. It includes the data collection methods and the analysis techniques. The third part of the paper discusses the results of the study. It includes the findings and the conclusions. The fourth part of the paper discusses the implications of the study. It includes the practical implications and the theoretical implications. The fifth part of the paper discusses the future research. It includes the suggestions for further studies and the conclusions.



The study was conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner. The data was collected from a large sample of participants. The analysis was conducted using advanced statistical techniques. The results of the study are presented in a clear and concise manner. The findings of the study are discussed in detail. The conclusions of the study are based on the findings and the analysis. The implications of the study are discussed in detail. The future research is suggested based on the findings and the conclusions.

The study has several strengths and limitations. The strengths of the study include the large sample size and the use of advanced statistical techniques. The limitations of the study include the cross-sectional design and the self-reported data. The study has several implications for practice and theory. The findings of the study can be used to inform practice and theory. The study has several suggestions for future research. Further studies should be conducted to explore the findings of the study.

cannot restore the Union by means of the sword. I should be glad today, (July 10, 1861) to accept any measure of conciliation. I am willing to make any concession to bring us back to the point where we were last year. I do not believe we shall get back to it by the force of arms".¹ These were the factors in the north itself that tended towards a destruction of the apparent unity of purpose of April, 1861.

The first year of the war ended without the attainment of marked military success by the northern armies and with a tendency towards division in the north people with regard to the support of the administration and the war.

The year 1862 brought no great military achievements. The armies continued to try to invade the south and the democrats at home were trying to embarrass the government in such a way as to count towards their political success in the fall of 1862. It was in this year, that the word 'Copperhead' was first used in connection with the obstructionist schemes. The copperheads began to organize, they became bolder and more of a danger to the government, and the troops began to speak of them as the fire in the rear. This fire could be seen flashing out in Congress, in the cities, in rural districts, in press, peace meetings and democratic conventions. Many democrats, however, limited their opposition only to those who were directing the war and tried to distinguish between opposition to war and opposition to the republicans.

Two congressmen from Ohio, Cox and Vallandigham, were very industrious in the House when it came to pointing out how the adminis-

¹ Annual Encyl., 1861, p. 229.

tration had overstepped its constitutional powers and how the Union could be restored by means of conciliation, compromise and constitutional amendments. Thaddeus Stevens introduced a resolution into the House that provided that if any person in the employment of the United States in either the legislative or executive branches should propose to make peace or should accept or advise the acceptance of such on any other basis than the integrity and entire unity of the United States and territories as they existed at the time of the rebellion, he would be guilty of a high crime. It was aimed primarily at the Copperheads, and Vallandigham proposed amendments that "the Union as it was ought to be maintained; also the Constitution, including the fifth amendment, that it was a high crime for any civil or military officer of the United States to advise acceptance of any peace plans other than the integrity of the federal union and that whosoever should prevent the war to one of subjugation or for interfering with established institutions of the states shall be guilty of high crime and whosoever should affirm that this house was competent to establish a dictatorship is guilty of high crime" ¹ Another characteristic copperhead attitude was shown in Cox's proposed amendment to a resolution that described the rebels as assassins. "Assasins," he moved, "meant all men from the North or the South who had been instrumental in producing the war and especially those guilty of flagrant breaches of the Constitution and who are not in favor of the establishment of the union as it was and the Constitution as it is." ² They made a regular business of introducing resolutions that

¹ Annual Encylop., 1863, p. 19.

² Annual Encylop., 1863, p. 234.

called for the investigation of different arbitrary arrests. On every appropriation bill, they tried to tack on riders providing that the money should not be used in the subjugation of the states or the interfering with African slavery in the states.¹ Vallandigham boasted that he had never voted one dollar of money whereby one drop of American blood should be shed in a civil war.⁴ He opposed in Congress the new oath of allegiance required of West Point cadets which made allegiance to the nation greater and paramount to that of the state.² According to the copperheads, the war had a four fold object; power, plunder, negro equality, and southern subjugation.³ Every measure of the administration tending to strengthen the power of the north was decried as unconstitutional. But a large part of the democratic party was faithful to the republican government. In October, 1861, Tammany Hall passed resolutions in which, referring to the measures called unconstitutional by the copperheads, they said, "It is imperatively required to take every step which may be necessary to secure the triumph of our arms and that his (Lincoln) measures in this respect will be passed upon by a generous and patriotic people who will judge with just appreciation of the difficulties with which he is surrounded."⁵ This attitude was essentially different from the obstructionist policy of the copperheads.

Vallandigham held a position in advance of most of the copperheads in 1862 in opposition to the war. He even spoke of forming a confederacy in the northwest equal in size to one third of all Europe

¹ Gue Iowa, Vol. I. p. 81.

² Life of Vallandigham, p. 173.

³ Marshall, p. 143.

⁴ Life of Vallandigham, p. 141.

⁵ Brummer, p. 172.

and of securing a maritime boundary by cleaving the way to the sea by the sword.¹ It was an idea which a few attempted to put into execution in 1864.

From Connecticut to Iowa, some democratic leaders were hitting at the war policy incessantly. The democratic state convention of Iowa on July 4, 1862, adopted resolutions that "our Union was formed in peace and could never be perpetuated by force of arms and that a republican government held together by the sword becomes a military despotism."² Henry C. Dean of Iowa struck at the war in the characteristic method of the western copperheads. He said that the war was deliberate, systematic, and orderly on the part of the South. It was not rebellion for everything was done in subordination to the law and the sovereign power of the states in which it transpired. It was not revolution for it changed none of the organic laws of the states and the people armed themselves by law to repel a threatened invasion of the country and overthrow of their government and violation of all their rights.³ Lincoln had torn up the constitution and in its place given his own arbitrary will. He had selected the weakest, worst, and most corrupt men who served him as instruments of usurpation. He had corrupted one part of the church to engage in warfare with the other, burned 1200 houses of worship, mutilated grave yards, left whole cities in ashes, dragged ministers from their knees in the very act of worship and had had their daughters stripped naked by negro soldiers.⁴ He characterized the army as "a reckless mercenary mob of unfortunate conscripts driven to slaughter. The degradation of society was complete. Manufacturers closed their mills and sold their

¹ Life of Vallandigham, p. 147.

² Gue, Iowa, Vol. I, p. 81.

³ Gue, Iowa, Vol. I, p. 82.

⁴ Gue, Iowa, Vol. I, p. 82.

operatives to the recruiting sergeant, merchants refused credit to the poor in order to drive them into the army.....to fight the battles of plunder for the rich.Parents might be seen selling their children in the conscript market and complacently walking away with the price of their own blood in their pocket."¹ Every friend of peace should oppose the payment of the war debt.²

This opposition to the war, as long as it was restricted to isolated individuals, was not very dangerous; but it became apparent in 1862 that this opposition was organizing itself into secret societies that became known as Circles of Honor, Order of American Knights, Knights of the Golden Circle and Sons of Liberty. Every copperhead was supposed to be a member of these organizations. In the summer of 1862, the first state councils of these societies were held at Bloomington in Illinois and Indianapolis in Indiana, and as their secret character made them feared as allies of the South, the grand juries began investigations.³

It seems that for many years before the outbreak of the Civil War, a secret order called the "Knights of the Golden Circle" had existed among the aristocracy of the South. The main political work of the society seemed to be to get the national government to acquire Mexico and Cuba. The society had included some northern democrats and after the outbreak of the war they extended the society all through the conservative democracy of the North in order to do political work.⁴ The name "Knights of the Golden Circle" was discarded for that of the "Order of American Knights", which in turn was

¹ Gue, Iowa, Vol. I, p. 83

² Gue, Iowa, Vol. I, p. 183.

³ Eddy, Vol. II, p. 585.

⁴ Harpers Weekly, Vol. 6, p. 227; Life of Vallandigham, p. 371; Logan's Conspiracy

Changed to "Sons of Liberty" at the meeting of the Supreme Council at New York on March 1, 1864.¹

The organization was on a semi-military basis. In each county one parent temple was at the head of the local lodges in each township. Each year the parent temples sent delegates to a convention of representatives. This grand council of the state sent representatives to the national supreme council. The government of the order in the state was in the hands of a grand commander and the major-generals for each military district that the federal government had created. These officials were elected annually at the state council and were supposed to direct the activities in their districts.² Vallandigham estimated the membership of these lodges at 500,000 men.

In his report to the government on these secret societies, Judge-advocate Holt claimed that the leaders used this great organization for the purpose of raising an armed force sufficiently strong to establish a Northwestern Confederacy. Until that was accomplished it was to aid the South in every possible way, discourage enlistments and furnish rebels with ammunition and protect rebel spies.³ The thing in which the leaders succeeded, however, in accomplishing thru these societies was the spread of their doctrines among the more ignorant electorate so as to bring the greater part of democracy over to the copperhead viewpoint and serve as a strong machine in the fall elections.⁴ The different degrees in the order created a hierarchy that could be handled by a few leaders at the top. Not much is known

¹ Life of Vallandigham, p. 373; Moses, p. 689; Ayers, p. 18-19.

² Logan, Vol. II, p. 709-61.

³ Logan, Vol. II, p. 709-761.

⁴ McPherson, p. 177.

of the ritual except that it was a lesson in states rights, state sovereignty, resistance to the violation by the government of the constitutional guaranties, all of which was expressed in lofty bombastic language.¹

In Southern Indiana, Ohio and Illinois, the chief strength of these organizations lay in the country districts. Further north, the lodges were chiefly clubs in the cities at which on certain nights all copperheads were welcomed to indulge in copperhead political philosophy and poor whiskey.² New lodges were formed by sending trustees into new districts and they picked out a few reliable peace men to whom they exposed all the secrets and the ritual of the order. These local leaders organized the township temple.³

Ayer, a federal spy on the organization in Chicago, described a meeting of such a lodge in one of the worst districts of Chicago. "Peace" or "Peoria" was the pass word. A reader hurriedly rambled thru the ritual that dealt mostly about the loftiness of the states rights and justification for secession. The candidate for initiation swore to the dogmas that the ritual set forth. Then the older men crowded around him and expressed their joy that he was coming into fellowship with those who were going to give the abolitionists and Lincoln "particular hell under the shirt tail". Then last of all the Grand Seignior explained the mysteries of the initiation and gave him the distress call "Ocoon".⁴

William Clayton, a farmer of Warren County, testified at a trial that he had been initiated at a congregation in the timber,

¹ Judge Holts Report, Logan, Vol. II, p. 709-761.

² Ayers, passive.

³ Ayer, p. 18.

⁴ Ayer, p. 28.

that he took a long oath of which the only significant part was that he "pledged to take up arms if required to in the cause of the oppressed against the usurpers' war on a people endeavoring to establish a government for themselves in accordance with the eternal principles of truth". He said that he understood the purpose of the order was primarily to beat the republicans at the polls and the force of arms was only to be resorted to in case of necessity. In case of a rebel invasion it was understood that they were to unite with the rebels.¹ The main purpose was political but each saw the purpose according to his own hopes; hence, as the society included the southerner who lived in the north, and the northern opportunist, and the northern democrat who joined just because others were joining, it was natural that each tried to use it for his own purpose.² Even Vallandigham said he had suspicions that the order was used to further the cause of disunion.³ Lincoln understood the amount of revolutionary energy which the order possessed when he said, "Nothing can make me believe that one hundred thousand Indiana democrats are disloyal. To declare in their secret councils that they were ready to shed the last drop of their blood to abolish it, (the Union),- to express their ardent sympathy with its enemies and their ardent detestation of its officers and supporters was one thing. But this is the limit of their criminal courage. Shedding the last drop of one's blood is a comparatively easy sacrifice; it is shedding the first drop that counts and these rural Catalines were never quite ready to risk their skins for their so called principles."⁴

¹ Nicolay and Hay, Vol. 8, p. 6.

² Annual Encyl., 1864, p. 438.

³ Life of Vallandigham, p. 375.

⁴ Nicolay and Hay, Vol. 8, p. 13.

The organization of the copperheads counted in the election of 1862. In the autumn of that year the congressmen who had been elected in 1860, had again to face the constituencies of their districts. The war had not resulted in any great advance towards the restoration of the Union and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and the military arrests in the north gave the democrats plenty of campaign material.¹ The democratic candidates, however, had to cater both to the Union democracy and to the copperheads in order to unite both in their support. Copperheads seeking election spoke of war when it was of advantage to do so. Lord Russel, the British ambassador, said that opinions in favor of the termination of the war "had been ill received so that a strong declaration to the contrary was deemed necessary by the democratic leaders. At the present moment, therefore, the conservative leaders call loudly for a more vigorous prosecution of the war and reproach the government with slackness as well as of success. They only want to put the North in a position where it can demand an armistice with honor, to be followed by a convention where the South will be guaranteed certain constitutional rights".² This was particularly true in the East. But in the West the copperheads were in the majority. Vallandigham in a speech on July 7, 1862, at Columbus, Ohio, reproached the republicans, "Again I ask you why they do not take up their muskets and march to the South like brave men instead of threatening, cravenlike, to fight unarmed democrats at home--possibly armed, and possibly not".³ Pendleton spoke at a democratic jubilee in Butler County, Ohio, in the summer of 1862. "I came to see if there were any 'Butternuts' (synonymous with term cop-

¹ White, p. 197.

² Greely, Vol. II, p. 485.

³ Life of Vallandigham, p. 209.

perhead) in Butler County. I came to see if there were any copper-heads as my friends of the Cincinnati Gazette are fond of terming the democracy of the county. I came to tell you that there are a good many of that stripe of animal in old Hamilton. I have traveled about the country of late and I assure you there is a large crop of 'butternuts' everywhere; not only that, but the quality and character of the nut is quite as good as the quantity."¹

Not only were congressmen to be elected in 1862 but also many state governors and legislatures.² In New York, Horatio Seymour was the democratic candidate for governor and he secured the support of both Tammany, representing the war democrats, and Mozart Hall, representing the peace democrats.³ Harper's Weekly stated, in an editorial, that "men who are opposed to the government of the United States, who can find excuses for rebels but none for the chosen rulers of the country, who have a hundred schemes for destroying and remodeling the Union but not one for simply maintaining the Union of our fathers,--these men will vote for Seymour".⁴

The democrats came very near carrying everything in the election. The legislatures of the central states were all democratic and from these states fifty-nine opponents to the administration were elected to Congress while only forty men favorable to it were returned. The border states and the extreme West gave, however, the republicans a bare majority in Congress. Seymour won in New York. The legislatures of the central states, although democratic, were held in

¹ William Hayes, Vol. I, p. 302.

² Harper's Weekly, Vol. 6, p. 691.

³ Bremmer, p. 327.

⁴ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 6, p. 674.

check by the republican war governors.¹ Vallandigham received no benefit from the democratic victories as his district had become republican owing to some gerrymandering by the old republican legislature.² Greeley said that the democrats won because they stayed at home to vote while the republicans had gone south to fight.³ Dissatisfaction with the results of the war, fear of the coming emancipation proclamation, secret organization of the copperheads, their political activity, and the doubtful political faith of the candidates that united both democratic factions in their support, explain in a measure the result of the election. The election once secured, the leaders could successfully throw off the mask and show their true spirit.

One great cause of division in the democratic ranks was Lincoln's promise to issue an emancipation proclamation.⁴ To many a northern democrat, it was flagrant abolitionist violation of a constitutional right of a state. It turned the war into a war for the negro. The war democrats supported the proclamation. The estrangement is illustrated by Wood's remark that there "cannot be war democrats, because that involves the necessity of supporting the policy of this war. The minute that they did, they would become abolitionists".⁵ Fernando Wood also sent a letter to Lincoln in December 1862, which illustrates the copperhead viewpoint on the continuance of the war. "Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always, and when, after much loss on both sides and no gain on either, you cease fighting the identical questions will intervene and settle the controversy. You know that since the establishment of Christian civilization, ne-

¹ Blaine, p. 443.

⁴ Randall, p. 209.

² Randall, p. 205.

⁵ Brummer, p. 305.

³ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 6, p. 738.

gotiation, and compromise have sooner or later determined every military conquest. It cannot be otherwise here. Has not the time come, when, to quote your own language, we should cease fighting and at least ascertain whether the identical questions about which we began to fight may not amicably and honorably be adjusted and the terms of intercourse be once more peacefully established?"¹ The difference between the war democrats and copperheads grew greater and greater so that in the elections of 1863, we often find a war democrat as a nominee of the Union party in opposition to a copperhead candidate for the democratic party.²

Vallandigham returned to fill out his short term in Congress in 1863, glorying in the bad prospects of national success.³ He likened the North on the slavery question to Cain and the South to Abel. "Cain troubled himself about the sacrifices of Abel and slew him."⁴ On January 14, 1863 he delivered his great philippic against the administration and the war. "You have not conquered the South and you never will. The war for the Union was abandoned and war for the negro begun. Stop fighting! Make an armistice. Accept at once friendly foreign mediation. I see nothing before the nation but universal political and social revolution, anarchy and bloodshed, compared with which the reign of terror was a merciful visitation."⁵ His days in Congress, however, were soon over and he went back to the central states to further the "peace" work there.

Things were not running as smoothly in the central states as they might have done. When the Illinois legislature, elected in 1862,

¹ MePherson, p. 296

² Randall, Vol. 4, p. 209; Greeley, Vol. II, p. 510.

³ Annual Encyl., 1863, p. 265.

⁴ Rhodes, Vol. IV, p. 226.

⁵ Moses, p. 667.

met on January 5, 1863, a copperhead was elected speaker. In his address he said, "I trust that you will feel it your duty to enter the solemn protest of the people of Illinois against the impolicy and imbecility, which after such heroic and long continued sacrifices, . . . still leaves this unholy rebellion not only not subdued, but without an immediate prospect of termination, and I trust your action may have a potent influence in restoring to our distracted country the peace and union of by-gone days.¹ The prorogation of the legislature by Governor Yates on a technicality was the only thing that prevented the passage of resolutions demanding the recall of Emancipation Proclamation, an armistice and a national convention of all the states to settle the difficulties. In Indiana the republicans withdrew from the legislature so that it lacked the necessary quorum for passing the proposed bills for the taking away of the military control from the governor and placing it in the hands of a copperhead committee. No appropriation bills were passed and the national government had to furnish the state with money until a new legislature could be elected.² In Ohio, Governor Todd was arrested under an indictment for causing the arrest of a Dr. Olds, a copperhead, in 1861. In fact, the copperheads were becoming bolder and bolder as their power grew.³

General Burnside was in command of the military district that included Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio and he decided to take military measures to combat the copperhead influence. He forbade by military orders the circulation of the New York World thru the mails and seized the office of the Chicago Times. Lincoln, however, revoked the latter order as the agitation resulting from it would have harmed the

¹ Annual Encyl., 1863, p. 528.

² Randall, p. 214.

³ Randall, p. 214.

government more than the newspaper.¹ Burnside also decided to strike at the peace meetings and issued his "General Order Number 38" which provided that "all persons found within our lines who commit acts for the benefit of the enemies of our country will be tried as spies and traitors and, if convicted, suffer death. The habit of declaring sympathies for the enemy will no longer be tolerated in this district. Persons committing such offenses shall be at once arrested with view to be tried as spies or traitors or sent beyond our line to their friends."²

The peace meetings continued to draw large crowds and Burnside's order was openly attacked. Vallandigham addressed such a meeting at Mt. Vernon, Ohio, on the evening of May 1, 1863. A large parade was formed where standards inscribed, "Constitution as it is and the Union as it was", "The Copperheads are coming" and "Liberty" were carried. People wearing the Indian head badges could be seen everywhere, while soldiers in civilian clothes mingled with the crowd.³ Vallandigham had a sympathetic audience. He said the war was a wicked, cruel, unnecessary war,--a war not being waged for the Union but for the crushing out of liberty, the erection of a despotism, a war for the enslavement of the whites and the freedom of the blacks. "The sooner the people inform the minions of usurped power that they will not submit to restrictions of their liberties the better."⁴ He warned the people to remember that it was a wicked abolition war and that if those in authority were allowed to accomplish their purpose the people would be deprived of their liberties and a monarchy established. He did not counsel resistance to the military or civil law. That was not needed for,

¹ Randall, p. 214.

³ Annual Encyl., 1863, p. 474-480.

² Annual Encyl., 1863, p. 475.

⁴ Harper's Magazine, Vol. 27, p. 273.

said he, the people who would submit to such encroachment on their liberties did not deserve to be freemen.¹ As for Burnside's "Order Number 38", he said that he despised it, spat upon it and trampled it under his foot. (He undoubtedly spoke the truth.) His authority for speaking was a higher order than general order number 38. It was order number one, the Constitution.²

Vallandigham had really dared Burnside to carry out his order and on the night of May 4, 1863, a squad of soldiers arrived secretly at Dayton, Ohio, and arrested Vallandigham at his home and took him to Cincinnati, where he was confined at the Kemper barracks.³ He was indicted for violating general order number 38, and on May 16, 1863 he was tried by a court martial and sentenced to imprisonment during the war. On May 19, Lincoln ordered him transported to the Confederate lines. Vallandigham was entertained fairly well in the South. He encouraged them by saying that if they could "only hold out one more year the peace party of the North would sweep the Lincoln dynasty out of existence."⁴ He succeeded in running the blockade, went to Canada and before long he was holding conferences with his confederates at Windsor on the Niagara River.

The arrest of Vallandigham caused a great deal of commotion in the North. The arrest itself was legal, but according to law the secretary of war was to report the charges within twenty days and if no indictment was found by the grand jury, the prisoner was to be freed.⁵ Vallandigham's arrest was typical of thousands of similar

¹ Annual Encycl., 1863, p. 475.

² Sherman, Vol. I, p. 322; Annual Encycl., 1863, p. 475.

³ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 7, p. 307; McPherson, p. 162.

⁴ Greely, Vol. II., p. 666.

⁵ White, p. 205.

cases. His, however, attracted particular attention because of the prisoner's prominence. Almost every state sent in democratic resolutions protesting against the treatment given the "gentleman from Ohio". In answering the Albany Resolutions, Lincoln defended his position. He said, "We all know that combinations, armed in some instances to resist the arrest of deserters, began several months ago, that more recently the like has appeared in resistance to the enrollment preparatory to a draft and that quite a number of assassinations have occurred from the same animus. This had to be met by military force and this leads to bloodshed and death. I solemnly declare my belief that this hindrance of the military including the maiming and murder is due to the course in which Mr. Vallandigham has been engaged and it is due to him personally in a greater degree than to any other man."¹....."He who dissuades one man from volunteering or induces one soldier to desert weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a Union soldier in battle. Yet dissuasion may be so conducted as to be no defined crime of which any civil court would take cognizance."² He stated concisely the issue when he said, "Must I shoot a simple minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wily agitator who induces him to desert?"³ In answering the Ohio resolutions, Lincoln said he would release Vallandigham if the Ohio democracy would subscribe to three propositions; first, "that there is now a rebellion in the United States, the object and tendency of which is to destroy the national union and that in your opinion an army and navy are constitutional means of suppressing that rebellion"; second, "that you will not do anything to decrease or

¹ McPherson, p. 171.

² Greely, Vol. II, p. 492-3.

³ Blaine, p. 492.

lessen the efficiency of the army or navy while engaged in the effort to suppress the rebellion"; third, "that each of you will do all he can to have the officers, soldiers and sailors of army and navy while engaged in suppressing rebellion to be paid, fed and clad."¹ It was the non acceptance of this position that had distinguished the copperheads and the replies of the Ohio delegates were evasive. The democracy was heavily loaded with copperhead trappings.

A year later in referring to the matter, Lincoln said, "A life is never given up to save a limb. I felt that measures, otherwise unconstitutional might become lawful by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the Constitution thru the preservation of the nation. Right or wrong, I assumed this ground and now avow it."² The justification of the arbitrary arrests under Lincoln lies in their necessity as the only means of preventing anarchy.³ This particular arrest, however, raised Vallandigham to the rank of a martyr among his adherents and furnished campaign ammunition for 1864.

Armed resistance to the draft, encouraged by the spread of the copperhead attitude, occurred in most of the northern states. In Rush county, Indiana, a provost marshal, a detective and enrolling officer were shot.⁴ In Iowa, a copperhead peace meeting became, as the result of a riot between it and a party of unionists, a drilled and armed camp of two thousand men that had to be dispersed by state troops.⁵ Trouble began in Ohio when, on July 5, 1863, an enrolling officer was driven out of Richland township, Noble county. The provost marshal

¹ Blaine, p. 492.

² Greeley, Vol. II, p. 656.

³ Randall, p. 225.

⁴ Vallandigham, p. 403.

⁵ Gue, Iowa, p. 88-89.

with a posse of men went into a village in the township and arrested four of the ringleaders, but before they reached another county a band of one hundred and fifty men rescued the prisoners. On July 12 and 13, other enrolling officers were driven out of the county and two companies of state troops had to be sent to quell the little insurrection. Bloodshed was prevented when the rural rebel army allowed the soldiers to arrest the original four prisoners and nine others who had led the rescue party.¹

Riots occurred in the different large cities of the East, but the draft riot in New York city was the most serious. Seymour had sent the state troops to join the army of the Potomac which was then engaged in pushing back Lee from Pennsylvania and when the draft was begun on July 16, 1863, the only protection for the federal officers was the metropolitan police.² On the 12th the names of the conscripts were published and on the 14th, processions, evidently preorganized, began to surge thru the streets. Up to the 16th mobs pillaged and burned public and private property in the cities and committed atrocities on the negroes who fell into their hands. Order was restored by troops that had been withdrawn from the front, but not until one-hundred lives had been lost in the riots and \$2,500,000 worth of property destroyed.³ Riots occurred also in Boston, Jersey City, Troy and Jamaica. They were not the result of a loyal attitude, but rather the active translation of the attitude of the copperheads.

Many old democrats who had previously approached rather close to the copperhead line became about this time ardent war democrats;

¹ Randall, p. 213.

² Annual Encyl., 1863, p. 871.

³ Brummer, p. 320.

Van Buren, Bancroft and Brady are good examples. The South they said had turned aside all efforts at compromise and it was now war for the Union.¹ Van Buren and Bancroft became active leaders in the organization of the "Loyal Leagues" in opposition to the copperhead societies.²

The copperheads were badly mistaken in their ideas concerning the attitude of the South. Of course the South did not discourage the growth of the peace party, but they did not encourage it because of their love for peace. The Richmond Enquirer said , that northern democracy were as "fierce in their apostasy of former principles" as Butler himself but there were still five just men in Sodom,--one Pierce, one Vallandigham, one Wood and two Seymours.³ As to the South's desire for peace and Union, resolutions introduced in the Confederate Congress in 1863 stated that the only basis for negotiation was a formal and unconditional recognition of the independence of the Confederate states.⁴ Articles in the press claimed that they were "determined to die rather than to live with them (North) in the same community." Another article warned "the democracy and conservatives of the North to dismiss at once the miserable delusion that the South can ever consent to enter again upon any terms the old union. If the North will allow us to write the Constitution itself, we would sooner be under the government of England or France than under a union with men who have shown that they cannot keep good faith."⁵

¹ Bremner, p. 297.; Harper's Weekly, Vol. 7, p. 177.

² Brummer, p. 297-9.

³ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 7, p. 147.

⁴ Annual Encyl., 1864, p. 215.

⁵ Pollard, p. 362-2.

The copperheads seemed unable to appreciate this view point of the South. Whether or not they refused to acknowledge it simply because they thought it advantageous politically to insist upon it, is impossible to tell. When the attitude of the South became clearer, the opposition by the copperheads shifted to other ground. Wood at a peace meeting on June 6, 1863 said, "Experience shows that the overruling power of God is against us. We cannot succeed in what we have undertaken".¹ In other words, they began to agitate for peace because war was a failure and not because the union could be restored by peace and conciliation. Of course they still held out the prospects of reconstruction by peace. "If a democrat were president," said Wood, "he would restore the Union without further loss of blood. He would cease hostilities and take a step toward ascertaining if a conference could be obtained".² It was good campaign material but the men who proposed it knew also how sound it would be in practice.

The elections of 1863 in the states resulted generally in favor of the republicans. They won in New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Ohio, California and Iowa. But this success was not due to weakness of the copperhead element. On the contrary, they were better organized than ever before. The reason lay in the merger of many of the war democrats and republicans in a so-called Union party.³ This is illustrated best in the Ohio election. Brough, a war democrat, was nominated by the Union party in opposition to Vallandigham, the democratic nominee. True, Vallandigham was still an exile, but the democrats thought that his election as governor would be

¹ Harper's Magazine, Vol. 27, p. 274,

² Brummer, p. 306.

³ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 7, p. 243.

a great blow to the national government. The two candidates themselves, suggest the division that had taken place in the old democracy. Brough won by a majority of 101,000 votes and vallandigham did not return to Ohio as soon as he had expected.¹ With reference to the copperhead movement, the year 1863 was distinguished by active forcible resistance to the government, by the decrease of political power of its leaders in governmental affairs, by a further division between the two democratic wings, and by the growth of a feeling among the copperheads that the war was a failure and peace should be established on the best terms that could be secured. The following year marks a further development of these tendencies, a great effort to secure the national election, and the utilization of the societies for the promotion of conspiracy schemes.

The information that can be secured in connection with these conspiracies is very disjointed. The favorite schemes and plans had to do with the formation of a Northwestern Confederacy, such as vallandigham had suggested early in the war. Agents of the confederate government were scattered thru the north planning to take advantage of any tendency or movement that might help their cause and embarrass that of the federal government.

Early in March 1864, the supreme council of the Sons of Liberty met at New York and elected Vallandigham the supreme commander of the order, even though he still kept up his residence outside of the United States. Vallandigham said that he was satisfied that nothing beyond a rightful resistance to any attempts to interfere with free-

¹ Sherman, Vol. I. p326.

dom of election was contemplated at the meeting.¹ It is impossible to tell what was discussed at the meeting, but in the same month Jefferson Davis sent agents north to see what plans could be carried out in releasing confederate prisoners, seizing northern cities and establishing a new confederacy.² Captain Hines was one of the chief agents. He proceeded to Canada where he got into touch with the Commissioner of the Confederacy. Conditions in the North seemed to be favorable for work of confederate agents for as early as April 1864, plans had been laid by some of the copperheads for raids on the arsenals at Indianapolis, Springfield and St. Louis and the seizure of control of these three states. One plan provided for the assassination of Governor Morton of Indiana and the transfer of the office to Dodd, the head of the Indiana conspirators.³

Hines visited Vallandigham at Windsor on June 9, 1864 and on June 11, Thompson, the Confederate Commissioner in Canada, had a conference with Vallandigham. It does not seem that Vallandigham himself arranged any schemes or plans with them but he introduced them to reliable men who could give them information as to how the secret societies could co-operate with the confederates.⁴ Money was needed and Thompson agreed to furnish money that was to be used by the agents of the order in promoting the "peace meetings" and the buying of arms and ammunition. Hines, himself, crossed the border and worked secretly throughout the North. At the meeting of the supreme council of the order at Chicago on July 20, 1864, plans were discussed as to the way in which this money ought to be distributed and there were

¹ Life of Vallandigham, p. 373.

² Randall, Vol. IV, p. 264.

³ Ayer, p. 83.

⁴ Randall, p. 265; Life of Vallandigham, p. 377.

talks about planning an uprising.¹ It is impossible to tell just how the money was distributed, whether it was simply divided up among parties looking out for their individual welfare or used for military preparation. It is true, however, that contracts were signed for a great amount of ammunition and that the federal authorities seized thirty two cases of arms at Indianapolis before they were delivered to the consignees.² Rumors of impending revolts were becoming numerous and the people of the rural districts exchanged their products as soon as possible for currency, which they considered safer in case hostilities should break out.³

The confusion is illustrated by the fact that Thompson, the commissioner in Canada thought that the meeting of the supreme council of the Order of American Knights at Chicago on July 20 was to be the signal for a revolt of all the copperheads. In reporting to the Confederate government he told of the formation of a conspiracy for the purpose of establishing a northwestern confederacy to demand peace. If peace could not be secured by this move, the Northwest would join the South in forcing the remnant of the United States to give up the idea of coercion. Hines was to take charge of the revolt at Chicago and Castleman, another confederate agent, was to take command at Rock Island.⁴ After several shifting of dates August 29th, the day of the assembling of the democratic convention was agreed upon by a rather large part of the conspirators. But there was no agreement or understanding among all. In southern and central Indiana there seemed to be an idea that it was to begin on August 16th.⁵ Evidently there was

¹ Ayer, p. 47.

² Ayer, p. 47.

³ Ayer, p. 69-70.

⁴ Randall, p. 267.

⁵ Nicolay, and Hay, Vol. 8, p. 7-8.

no great organized movement.

Two days before the assembling of the democratic convention in Chicago, people began to pour into the city. From the conversation that could be heard on streets, it is said that a stranger might well have thought that he had come to Charleston. On the night of the twenty eighth, a final meeting was held by the promoters of the revolt at the Richmond House. But at the meeting, the Sons of Liberty told of a rumor that seven thousand federal troops had arrived in the city and the Sons of Liberty refused to act. Hines realized then that his game was over and left Chicago that night just in time to escape arrest.¹ In my opinion the idea of an open revolt was not seriously considered by the greater leaders of the copperhead movement. If they had done so, they would not have thrown so much energy in securing political control of the democratic convention that was to meet on the same day that the insurrection was to begin. The planning of revolution was left to the smaller local leaders and to those who wrought pecuniary profit in plans and preparations.²

Vallandigham was back in the United States again leading in the same way as he had done before. He had spent the first half of the year in Canada but had still remained in close touch with the situation as supreme commander in the "Sons of Liberty". In February 1864, his case had come up in the Supreme Court and it was decided that an appeal could not be taken from a military commission to the Supreme Court.³ As to whether he could legally return or not, the practical difficulties seemed to be the deciding factor. Senator Sherman of

¹ Randall, p. 27.

² Nicolay and Hay, Vol. 8, p. 6-10.

³ McPherson, p. 175.

Ohio warned Lincoln that in case Vallandigham was allowed to return, riots would break out in which Vallandigham would be the first victim.¹ The attitude of the people is shown by the fact that thirty students at the University of Michigan who made a pilgrimage to Canada to see Vallandigham were disgraced in resolutions passed by the student body.²

His place in congress was filled fairly well by Long, Wood, and Bayard. Bayard resigned from the Senate because of the test oath that was required and which he branded as the essential primary tool of oppression.³ They all struck at the war; but the way in which they singled out the war democrats shows that the different elements in democracy were getting further apart from each other. Wood of New York said in the House, "This war cannot restore the Union. The democratic party cannot be an abolition war party. There can be no such thing as a war democrat for he can't be a democrat and also a disunionist."⁴ Long closed a bitter copperhead speech on April 8, 1864 with the statement that nothing could be more fatal for the democratic party than to seek to come into power pledged to a continuance of the war. Such a policy would be libel upon the creed of the past and the ideas that lay at the basis of all free governments and would lead to its complete demoralization and ruin. "I believe the mass of the democratic party are for peace.....that they would be placed in a false position if they should nominate a war candidate for the presidency and seek to make the issue upon the narrow ground of how the war should be prosecuted."⁵ In short, he presented the issue of 1864 as it confronted the democratic party.

¹ Sherman, p.324.

² Harper's Weekly, Vol. 8, p.19.

³ Annual Encyl. Vol. 1864, p. 232. ⁴ Annual Encyl. Vol. 1864, p. 348.

⁵ Annual Encyl. Vol. 1864, p. 341.

In order for the copperheads to succeed in the work in which they had been engaged for four years, they had to secure the nomination of a peace man for the presidency and then get the country to elect him and the peace party to power.

Copperhead newspapers and peace meeting orators in the North were still lauding the South. The Metropolitan of New York spoke of Virginia as a "Grand old state! May we never see the day when you shall have to bow beneath the yoke of the oppressor. If that day shall ever come, then will the friends of freedom, the true lovers of heroism and manhood, mourn the sad fate of a great people who fell fighting for liberty and independence."¹ Two New York papers were temporarily suppressed for publishing a forged proclamation supposed to be issued by Lincoln calling for the drafting of 400,000 additional troops.² It was published with the intention of instigation popular feeling against the administration.

While the newspapers waged war on the Republicans, the copperhead leaders were busy in practical politics within the democratic party, for to them it was highly important that the democratic state conventions should send copperhead representatives to the national convention. Vallandigham stole down from Canada and reached Dayton, Ohio, on March 14, and addressed the democratic state convention.³ Later, Singleton, of Illinois, Vorhees, of Indiana and vallandigham went to New York to help Wood to secure a good peace delegation for the convention.⁴ At the state peace convention at Syracuse, resolutions were adopted asking the national convention to declare for an

¹ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 8, p. 243.; Greeley, Vol. II, -p. 498.

² McPherson, p. 192.

³ Randall, p. 266-7.

⁴ Brummer, p. 398-

end of the war by a vonvention of all the states, and demanded that peace candidates be nominated. McClellan leagues were immediately formed to counteract this tendency towards selection of a copperhead as the nominee.¹

The convention met at Chicago on August 29th, 1864. It was to have met on July 4, 1864 but the postponement to August did not aid the democratic cause thru any federal disaster as it had been hoped. It was opened by the temporary chairman with an appeal for peace and conciliation between the different wings of the party. "We come here not as war democrats or as peace democrats," he said, "but as citizens of a great republic." Seymour was elected chairman.² Seymour was a peace man, but not of the militant copperhead type, and his selection as chairman might indicate a median ground on which both sides hoped that they could meet.³ But it was hard to suppress the more turbulent elements. The abusive speech of Judge Miller of Ohio, who said that there was no real difference between a war democrat and an abolitionist as they were links out of one sausage made out of the dog was vigorously applauded.⁴

The first day was devoted to the organization of the convention. On the evening of the 29th, the convention committee on resolutions, in which Vallandigham and Tilden of New York represented the two extremes, met and tried to work out a platform. There were many different views in the convention. Some were for a cessation of hostil-

¹ Brummer, p. 399.

² New York Semi-Weekly Tribune, August 30, 1864.

³ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 8, p. 579.

⁴ Greeley, Vol. II, p. 667.

ities but if the rebels refused the armistice the war was to be pushed to the bitter end; others wanted the the platform broad enough so that anyone who had participated in the war could support it and others were for peace, with or without conditions.¹ These different views clashed in the committed but vallengham boasted later that he had carried the 'war failure' resolution thru the sub-committee and committee in spite of the violent opposition of the war democrats.² The resolutions which were reported were accepted on the next day by the convention with only four dissenting votes.³

The war failure resolutions showed the strength of the copperhead influence in democracy that was represented in the convention. The resolutions stated that "after four years of failure to restore the Union by the experiment of war, during which, under the pretence of a military power higher than the Constitution, the Constitution itself has been disregarded in every part and public liberty and private right alike trodden down and the material prosperity of the country impaired, justice, humanity, liberty, and public welfare demanded that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities with a view to an ultimate convention of all the states or other peaceful means to the end that peace may be restored on the basis of federal union of all the states."⁴ Cessation of hostilities, the failure of the war, criticism of infractions by the military power had been the food on which the copperheads had dieted during the war and now they had succeeded in making them the platform of the democratic party.

¹ Blaine, p. 525.

² Brummer, p. 405.

³ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 8, p. 579.

⁴ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 8, p. 579.

They were not however as successful in their choice of a presidential candidate. General McClellan was a popular man but he had been very instrumental in the beginning of the war in arresting members of the Maryland legislature and in suspending the writ of habeas corpus in that region. He secured the nomination, however, by a majority of ninety eight over all of his competitors.¹ It looked like a compromise in which the peace democrats wrote the platform and the other democrats made the presidential nomination.²

It is rather hard to reconcile McClellan's statements on his acceptance of the nomination with the platform on which he was supposed to stand. He said, "I could not look into the faces of my gallant comrades of the army and navy, who have survived so many bloody battles and tell them that their labors and the sacrifices of so many of our slain has been in vain, that we have abandoned the Union for which we have so often periled our lives." He repudiated the thought of peace just for the sake of peace. "Union is one condition of peace. We ask no more. If frank, earnest, persistent effort to obtain these objects should fail, the responsibility for the consequences will fall on those who remain in arms against the Union. No peace can be permanent without the union."³ McClellan tried to rob the platform of its copperhead trimmings but in doing so he made them all the more evident.

The differences between the conventions platform and the nominee's platform did not lead to much of division in the party because of, (as Long expressed it) a lack of enthusiasm.⁴ There was, however,

¹ Blaine, p. 529.

² New York Semi-Weekly Tribune, September 9, 1864.

³ Greeley, Vol. II, p. 669.

⁴ Annual Encycl., 1864, p. 795.

considerable dissatisfaction among the ultra copperheads concerning the nomination of McClellan. The New York Daily News in publishing the platform, said, "we accept the platform adopted by the convention as a great triumph for the peace party";¹ but on the publication of McClellan's letter of acceptance it said, "The man nominated to represent its (democratic) principles is therefore no longer the nominee of the Chicago Convention.....He has therefore no claim on the support of democracy as such. General McClellan's voice is for war."

McClellan had made the issue on the way the war was to be conducted and not on outright peace. Long, Benjamin Wood, and General Singleton of Illinois tried to assemble a thoroughbred copperhead convention at Cincinnati but it failed because no interest in it could be aroused.² While the copperheads growled about the democratic nominee, the war democrats railed against the platform. General Dix, a prominent leader of that faction said at a rally at Sandusky, Ohio, on October 2nd, "I believe that a cessation of hostilities would inevitably and directly lead to a recognition of the southern states, and when I say this I need hardly add that I can have no part in any political movement of which the Chicago platform is a basis. A peace which shall restore the Union and the Constitution lies in a steady, persistent and unremitting prosecution of the war."³

The result of all was that the democrats did not know whether they were supporting McClellan or the platform when they voted the democratic ticket. A cartoon in the issue of Harper's Weekly of November 12, 1864 showed Jonathan, Uncle Sam's predecessor, seated on a

¹ Harper's Weekly, Vol.8, p. 585.

³ Annual Encyl., 1864, p. 795.

² Brummer, p. 422.

horse representing Lincoln, while shrubbery in the distance was labeled "Compromise", "Peace" and "Chicago" and partly hid the McClellan horse. John Bull had stopped Jonathan and tried to induce him to change horses; but Jonathan answered, "Old Abe is just where I can put my finger on him; as for the other, though they say he is somewhere out in the scrub yonder, I never know just where to find him."¹ This was the way in which the Democratic party appeared in 1864; no one knew just what they did stand for.

In the campaign of 1864, the word "copperhead" was used in its broadest sense. The republicans used it to cover any one who would not give their support to the Union party, and it showed to many neutral democrats the great copperhead control of their party.² The success of the Union arms under Grant and Sherman pointed towards a speedy termination of the war and hence the "war failure" resolution of the peace party did not strike as hard as it would have done in 1862 or in 1863. The election of 1864 had been a goal of all the copperhead efforts. They had at last succeeded in making their platform the platform of the democratic party but the nomination of McClellan alienated part of their faction in a manner similar to the way in which the platform had alienated the war democrats. In the election they did not "sweep the Lincoln dynasty out of existence."³ The loss of the election and the close of the war by the conquest of the South ended the issues upon which the copperheads depended for existence; but the spirit lived on in the democratic party. The republicans referred to the copperheads whenever they waved the bloody

¹ Annual Encyl., 1864, p. 798.

² Harper's Weekly, Vol. 8, p. 736.

³ Harper's Weekly, Vol. 8, passive.

shirt,¹ and it was not until 1870 that Vallandigham accepted the result of the Civil War.

The connotation of the word copperhead has come to bring an idea of secret, traitorous conspiracies in the aid of the South. The word is hard to define, but it seems to me that it means a certain attitude of part of the people in the North,--an attitude that encourage the people to do what they could to obstruct the progress and actions of the federal government. The motives behind the attitude ranged from purely party political aims to traitorous designs to directly aid the South. The later motive is the one that we ordinarily think of; but in fact it was a political motive that induced most of the democrats to assume this attitude and become copperheads.

Every account of the copperhead movement seems to deal exclusively with startling revolutionary schemes and traitorous secret societies. The emphasis has been put in the wrong place. The copperhead movement does not represent anything which is quite as concrete as that. Revolutionary plots and traitorous societies existed but the copperhead movement as a whole represents the attitude of obstructing certain policies of the republican administration and the main purpose of the copperhead movement lay in the political field. The internal dissensions that arose in the North were not conflicts between traitors and loyalists, but rather struggles between two political factions that sought to find differentiating factors in the adoption of two different points of view on the prosecution of the war.

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Randall, Vol. Iv, p. 308-310.

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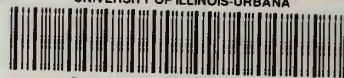
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